

# Upper Bucks youth coalition receives \$100,000 federal grant

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The Upper Bucks Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth Coalition recently received a \$100,000 federal grant for its drug-free communities support program.

"The funding will help us sustain our various projects in the Pennridge, Palisades and Quakertown area," said an elated Lee Rush of Perkasio, executive director of justCommunity Inc., which facilitates the coalition.

Rush explained the first organized drug-free communities support program started in the area in 1982 with the Pennridge Community Action Team, spearheaded by then-Pennridge administrator, Dr. Patricia A. Guth, now retired.

"We've been working at this for over 20 years and this is the first time we've garnered federal support," Rush told the News-Herald. "It shows the maturation of the coalition and the 40 Assets program, which is the guiding philosophy and framework for today's efforts."

The federal funding is on a five-year cycle, with \$100,000 each in the first three years and \$75,000 each in the fourth and fifth years, explained Rush, who said each year's funding is basically guaranteed if the work is carried out annually. That's a total of \$450,000 available to the group over the next five years.

Upper Bucks HC-HY was one of six such groups in the commonwealth to receive the awards, announced Oct. 21 at Norristown High School. Keynoting the speakers at the conference were John P. Walters, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy in Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania Sen. Arlen Specter.

In 2001, President Bush extended the Drug-Free Communities Program for five additional years through FY 2007 and authorized an additional \$399 million in funding.

The two major goals of the community-based program are to reduce substance abuse, including alcohol, tobacco and drugs among youth, and to strengthen the collaboration among various sectors in the community.

Officials explained the program currently supports some 714 communities nationwide, and that this fall, 227 new grants were awarded. The maximum award is \$100,000 per fiscal year, with each grantee required to match federal dollars with funds or in-kind support.

Rush said in-kind commitments would include such things as when Pennridge or other schools send staff to work on coalition projects including the Community Safe Homes Directory, Project Alert, the anti-drug and alcohol program for Pennridge sixth and seventh graders, or for the use of materials, fax and copier at the resource center donated by the RE/MAX 440 office in Perkasio.

The Upper Bucks HC-HY Coalition plans to use some of the grant money to expand the Upper Bucks Parenting Center, formerly known as the Quakertown Parenting Center, which serves Pennridge, Palisades and Quakertown.

The funding will also pay for hosting an Upper Bucks Youth Summit in the spring, when public and private school students will hold a town meeting with community leaders.

In addition, Rush said the money will fund a three-day training program this month in Washington D.C. that he will attend along with administrative assistant Pam Biresch, and Marlene Ruby, co-director of the Upper Bucks Parenting Center.

"Part of the money goes for salaries as well," said Rush.

In 1999, the LifeQuest Foundation awarded the local initiative with a three-year, \$170,000 startup and operating grant. Two years ago, a three-year state grant was received, with \$105,000 each to both Pennridge and Quakertown coalitions for the HC-HY programs. The two are now joined, with Palisades to become a member next year.

The coalition's goal is to promote the developmental assets, or building blocks, that are key in the development of youth. According to the 40 Assets program, the more assets youth have, the more likely they will grow up healthy and happy and communities will also benefit. The coalition also measures risk factors, such as drug and alcohol use, and attempts to lessen that use through community mobilization.